

eConsult FAQs

What is an online consultation?

An online consultation is a form of digital triage. Patients go online and submit information about medical or administrative requests to their own doctors. This request is sent to the GP practice to decide on the right care.

eConsult is the most widely used online consultation platform used in the NHS. eConsult can be accessed from your own NHS GP practice website. eConsult collects the information about your request and sends it to the GP practice. The GP practice staff will then triage (sort) each patient so that everyone gets the right care as quickly and as safely as possible.

What is triage?

Every day, GP practices receive requests for help or advice through patients calling in, walking in, and now also online via online consultations. For each patient request, the practice needs to work out:

- why they have sought help from their GP
- what kind of help the patient needs
- how quickly the patient needs help
- who is the best person to help this patient
- where the patient should be seen

These answers to these questions help the practice to sort patients based on their needs. This process is called triage. Triage is essential when you may be dealing with hundreds of patients a day, all with different needs, request and health backgrounds.

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What is eConsult ?

eConsult is a digital triage platform that allows patients to make medical or administrative requests to their NHS GP practice. By collecting patient information eConsult enables the practice to make safe and effective decisions on the right care for each patient.

eConsult allows you to seek self-help information from the NHS, through your GP practice or surgery website. Services include self-help information, advice or help from local services which may be appropriate for your condition, such as self-referral services or help from your local pharmacy.

How does eConsult work ?

eConsult asks you questions about your symptoms or existing condition and only takes a few minutes to complete. After filling in some details about you, to verify who you are, your eConsult is sent to your GP practice, so that they can help you. In having this information up front, your practice can then decide on the best course of action for helping you manage your symptoms and condition, and this may mean you don't have to come into the surgery unnecessarily.

If your symptoms sound very serious, the system has been built with the clinical knowledge to know that you may need help more quickly than your practice can provide – in these cases, it will stop you from completing your eConsult and suggest that you seek urgent medical advice.

Why use eConsult ?

One of the key benefits of eConsult is that it is available at any time and from any device – meaning you can ask for advice from your GP without having to queue on the phone at 8am or wait weeks for an appointment you may not need. You can complete eConsult from the comfort of your own home, on a break at work, or on the train home. eConsults can be clinical or administrative in nature,

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and in most cases, your GP may not need to see you face-to-face for an appointment.

If you decide you want to manage your condition without contacting your practice, eConsult can guide you towards trusted medical advice as well as relevant local services, such as pharmacy support, which may be more appropriate than visiting your GP practice.

The eConsult service can be trusted – it was built for NHS GPs by NHS GPs, and is the leading online consultation provider across the UK.

Who can use eConsult ?

eConsult is available for anyone from the age of 6 months and up. Parents or guardians can complete eConsults for children aged 6 months up to 18 years of age, although 16 to 18 year olds can also complete eConsults for themselves. There is no upper age limit for eConsults.

What can I use eConsult for ?

eConsult is one of a range of services your GP practice offers to make accessing the right help from general practice easy. eConsults can be either administrative or medical (clinical) in need.

eConsult can help you to manage your condition or symptoms by providing you with the best self-help information available, access to local services, or a convenient way to get help and advice from your GP practice. Instead of having to wait weeks for an appointment or queue on the phone for hours, eConsult allows you to tell your practice what you need help or treatment for, so that they can advise you on the best next steps, all at your convenience.

eConsult should not be used for emergencies. Should you report symptoms that our clinical governance team have deemed to

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require more urgent help than your GP practice may be able to provide, your eConsult will be stopped. You will be advised that your eConsult will not be sent to your practice, and that you should seek advice from the relevant urgent care service (e.g. A&E, Urgent Care Centre or NHS 111 helpline).

As a parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 6 months to 18 years, you will be able to submit eConsults about symptoms or conditions only if your practice has enabled this feature. If your practice does not allow for this, please speak to them about enabling paediatric eConsults.

eConsults can also be used to follow-up on previous discussions or appointments you have had with your doctor. This means you can avoid having to make an appointment with the doctor, but you can still keep them informed of the outcome. In this way, you can tell your doctor the outcome in your own time, knowing that they will respond in the most appropriate way, even if this is just to thank you for keeping them updated.

How do I access eConsult ?

eConsult is available on our practice website from any device and at any time of day. You will see a banner on your practice's website that invites you to contact your doctors online. Depending on the type of advice or help you then select, you will be presented with different options that may include an online form used to seek help or advice from your GP.

If you don't have access to the internet or a device that would allow you to use eConsult, you should speak to your practice and see if they can provide alternative arrangements for you to use the service. This may include a member of the admin or reception team helping you to complete an eConsult over the telephone. Some practices may put in place their own requirements for using the eConsult service, such as age or access restrictions.

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Can I submit an eConsult for someone else / my child ?

As a parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 6 months to 18 years, you will be able to submit eConsults about symptoms or conditions only if your practice has enabled this feature. Patients using the eConsult service should submit forms based on their own symptoms or conditions.

In some cases it may be likely that people need help submitting an eConsult, perhaps because they cannot access or are not comfortable using services online. In these situations, it is best to speak to your practice to see how they would like you to proceed.

What happens once I submit my eConsult ?

Once you have submitted your eConsult online, you will receive a copy of the eConsult report via email. This email will also contain the unique reference number for your eConsult, should you need to speak to the practice about any of the information it contains.

The practice will aim to respond to your eConsult by the end of the next working day.

The practice may respond in a variety of ways, based on the advised next steps or the urgency of the information you have provided:

You may be offered an appointment, either on the day or for a later date. This may not be with your GP, but may be with an Advanced Nurse Practitioner or other health professional at the practice, depending on your query.

You may receive a phone call for you to speak to a health professional at the practice, this is because you may not need a face-to-face appointment to resolve your query. This will save you from having to come into the practice.

You may be directed to another health professional outside of the practice, as they may be best placed to offer you the advice or support you need. These may include local pharmacy support, a minor injuries unit or other services such as physiotherapy.

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You may be directed towards the appropriate self-help advice by a member of the practice.

We may call you back or leave a voicemail if we are unable to reach you. You may receive a text message or email with further information, however, you may not be able to respond to the message you have received. This is to ensure your safety, as we cannot discuss personal matters unless we are certain we are speaking to you, or someone who you have authorised to speak to us on your behalf.

How will I benefit from eConsult ?

eConsult allows you to seek advice from your GP or to help yourself to manage your condition or symptoms at all hours of the day, from wherever you are. This may be the same GP at the same practice that you have been to for years, meaning they are familiar with your medical history and can continue to treat you.

The service will make interacting with your GP more convenient – you may not have to come into the practice to get help, meaning you don't have to take unnecessary days off from work or can stay at home if you feel poorly.

You won't have to queue on the phone as soon as the practice opens in order to get an appointment – you simply tell the practice what you need help or advice for, and they will let you know if you need a face to face appointment, and how soon this needs to be.

If your problem might be treated without a face-to-face appointment, saving you a trip to your practice. Instead, your GP may call you to discuss the best next steps, send you for tests before a face-to-face appointment, or send your prescription to the local pharmacy to be collected.

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How will the practice benefit from eConsult ?

Patients with the most urgent issues will be identified quickly and offered appointments earlier than the current system allows. This is because we will already have an idea of what you might need help for. This will improve safety by making sure those who need help quickly get it.

Your practice will try to make sure your eConsult is dealt with by the GP you have requested – this means you will continue to be cared for by the doctor that knows you best. This will be possible because they will have time to better manage the needs of all their patients.

Your GP may not be the most appropriate person to see – eConsult helps us to know what you might need help for so that you can see the right member of staff for the help you need the first time around. This means that we can better manage available resources in a time of difficulties within the NHS.

As your practice can see what patients using eConsult might need help for, requests can be seen and a decision made on how urgently patients need to be seen, if they need a face-to-face appointment at all. The practice can then offer appointments in the practice to those who need them most urgently, or are available to make visits to elderly patients at home or in care homes.